

The Status of Lyngngam

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Abstract

The Lyngngam speech form (spoken in the northwest of the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya) is considered a dialect of Khasi. However, recently Hamlet Bareh, a Khasi speaker, observed that it may not be appropriate to treat it as a dialect of Khasi. In this light the present study has been undertaken to ascertain the position of Lyngngam in relation to Khasi (standard).

First, around forty percent of Lyngngam's vocabulary seems to be unrelated to Khasi. There are some sound correspondences, but there are many problem areas as well. The process of contraction is not extensive. There is no concordial agreement such as is found in Khasi; also there is no adjective marker and no general number and gender elements. Case markers except for *ha*, are different from Khasi. Infixation seems to be more commonly employed. Suffixes are employed to some extent. Except for the first person sg., and 2nd person (personal) pronouns, the pronouns are different from Khasi. Lack of pronominal markers has eliminated interesting aspects of sex symbolism. However, this has resulted in compound constructions. Present and past tense markers are placed after the verb; future tense marker is placed before the verb. Aspect markers precede the verb like in Khasi. Interestingly, verbs (some at least) have full and contracted forms; the full form is employed in present and future tense, while the contracted form is employed elsewhere.

The Lyngngam speech form is spoken in the northwestern parts of the Khasi hills in Meghalaya state of India. Since Grierson's work (1904), Lyngngam has been considered as one of the dialects of Khasi. Only recently, that is in the late eighties, one scholar named Hamlet Bareh, a Khasi speaker, doubted the appropriateness of this classification. In his work Bareh has provided a few lexical items to make his point. After that, so far no work has discussed this issue. In the direction of filling this gap some data was collected by the present author in 1988 on this speech variety. Though this data is not sufficient for a detailed comparative study, it is still hoped that the various aspects of this speech variety presented below will show many interesting features about Lyngngam and (standard) Khasi.

1. Phonology

Tentative phonology of Lyngngam:

Vowels: i, (i:), e, ə, i, o, a, (a:), u.

Consonants: p, ph, b, t, th, d, c, ch, j, k, kh, g, ʔ, m, n, ɲ, ŋ, s, h, r, l, w, and y.

(i). Vowel length is phonemic in Khasi, but it appears that it is not so here. Instead only two vowels *i* and *a* seem to have long counterparts. (ii). Barred *i* [ī] is more frequent in this variety, and has wider distribution than in Khasi. (iii). The consonantal system is more symmetrical here than in Khasi, in the presence of voiceless and voiced palatal series. (iv). The aspirated stop series seems to be found only voiceless; a voiced series seems to be absent. (Even in Khasi voiced aspirates have very limited distribution). (v). Among the fricatives Khasi has both *s* and *ç* phonemes, whereas this variety has only *s*. (More detailed study is needed in this area).

2. Vocabulary

Nearly 40 percent of Lyngngam's vocabulary is unrelated to that of Khasi. Elsewhere, though similarities may be found in some words, sound correspondences are not very regular. Some such forms are listed below:

Nouns:

Related forms:

<i>Lyngngam</i>	<i>Gloss</i>	<i>(Standard) Khasi</i>	
snieʔ	'a bark (of a tree)'	ka snep	(-ie- < e, ʔ < -p)
əsim	'bird'	ka sim	
snam	'blood'	ka snam	
khmat	'eye'	ka khmat	
pilliŋ	'egg'	ka pillen	(ī < e)
cʔeŋ	'bone'	ka çʔeŋ	(c < ç)
torsim	'claw'	ka tirsim	(o < i)
lʔoʔ	'cloud'	u lʔoʔ	
ksu	'dog'	u kseu	(u < eu)
ləkur	'ear'	ka çkor	(De-clusterization by insertion of vowel a; l < ç, u < o:)

Some problematic cases:

kmyəŋ	'earth'	ka khindeu (?)
bimiŋ	'name'	ka kirteŋ (?)
domba	'mountain'	u lum

Unrelated forms:

əpa:u	'ashes'	u dpei
ləwba	'belly'	ka kpo?
eŋkriŋ	'breast'	ka çadem
ənot	'heart'	u kloŋsnam
yeŋmoryəŋ	'knee'	ka kho?sieu
khillai	'liver'	u do?nu:d
əmim	'meat'	ka do?
əga:p	'mouth'	ka ktien
eŋgi	'neck'	u rindaŋ
səŋpu	'night'	ka miet
əthot	'root'	ka tinrai
khoitlyəŋ	'seed'	u simbai
inthək	'smoke'	ka tdem
ya:urei	'sun'	ka sŋi
əmoin	'tooth'	u bniat
ra:ukma:u	'woman'	ka khinthei
bmya	'cheek'	ka ŋab
də-pam	'axe'	u sdie
kawa	'crow'	u tiŋa:b

In a list of 58 nouns in the data (not all are listed above), 38 seem to be related; 18 unrelated, and two doubtful cases. The various types of changes involved will be discussed later.

Verbs:

Related forms:

deit	'drink'	di?
thinnəŋ	'burn'	thaŋ
ŋinnap/ŋap	'die'	yap
ŋyəŋ	'stand'	ieŋ
binnəŋ/baŋ	'eat'	bam
innai	'give'	ai
innon/on	'say'	on
sŋgu/səŋgu	'hear'	sŋap
p/phinŋap	'kill'	pinyap
thilloit	'lie'	thok
toŋko?	'limp'	dko?

Unrelated forms:

kindei	'fly'	her
he?kən	'know'	tip
di/dinni	'walk'	ya:ɪd
kindur	'want'	kua?
khom/khənnom	'bind'	te?
sirpai	'rub'	ta?

hat ?incor	'clean'	khuid
imphak	'blossom'	phu?
imbəi	'blow'	put, etc.

Problematic cases:

ɲinnai	'swim'	jɲgi
thom/thinnom	'take'	çim

Out of 58 verbs, 21 are unrelated, 35 related, and two problematic.

Adjectives:

Related forms:

inɲoŋ	'black'	ba-yoŋ
ryəŋkhoŋ	'dry'	ba-rkhyaŋ
in-da:p	'full'	ba-dep
əɲju	'sour'	ba-jeu
əlli?	'white'	ba-lie?
sintim	'yellow'	ba-stem
obon	'many'	çi-bu:n
korəŋ	'male'	çinraŋ, etc.

Unrelated forms:

prəksop	'all'	ba-ro?
mərhyəŋ	'good'	ba-bha
əmmir	'fat'	ba-sɲaid
binsir	'cold'	ba-khryat
əllup	'hot'	ba-khluit
kca?	'bad'	ba-snieu
kɪnsan	'hard'	ba-e?
kirriŋ	'breadth'	ba-yar

Problematic cases:

jimbəit	'wet'	ba-jhie?
coŋne	'permanent'	ba-ne?
khinɲa?	'heavy'	ba-khya?

Out of 27 adjectives, 11 are unrelated, three are problematic and the rest are related.

Interrogatives: both are different.

ormat	'what'	-ei
bəyət	'who'	-no

Numerals:

On the whole, lower numerals agree. The following is a problematic case:

ilyaŋ ‘first’ niŋkoŋ

Some of the regular changes between these are listed below:

	<i>Khasi</i>		<i>Lyngngam</i>
ç- > c- :	çʔeŋ	‘bone’	cʔeŋ
	çoŋ	‘sit’	coŋ
	ça:d	‘dance’	ca:d
	çipheu	‘10’	cippheu
	çispaʔ	‘100’	cəʔspaʔ
	çʔyap	‘sand’	jeʔep
	çkoŋ	‘ear’	ləkoŋ
ç- > s- :	çniuʔ	‘hair’	snyək
	çnyaʔ	‘chisel’	snaŋ
y- > ɲ :	yoŋ	‘black’	ɲoŋ
	yap	‘die’	ɲap
-u- > -o- :	khu:m	‘child’	khon
	lu:m	‘hill’	dom
	suʔot	‘dysentery’	soʔot

A diphthong becomes a simple vowel:

-ai > -i :	bnai	‘month’	bni
	kwai	‘betelnut’	kwi
-əu/eu > -u:	ksəu	‘dog’	ksu
	jeu	‘sour’	ju
-ie- > -o- :	miet	‘night’	mot
-ie- > -i- :	sdieʔ	‘fry’	sindiʔ
-ie- > -u- :	hinpieu	‘seven’	hinpurə
-ei > -ə :	hinrei	‘six’	hrirə

(-rə is sort of a suffix, used with other lower numerals when used in isolation).

Some of the irregular changes:

-m > -ŋ :	ba:m	‘eat’	baŋ
l- > d- :	lu:m	‘hill’	dom
k- > g- :	kulai	‘horse’	gulai, etc.

Some of the important morphological features in which Lyngngam differs from Khasi are the following:

3. General word order

The word order is similar to that of Khasi at the sentential level: S-V-O.

- (L1) kinsai ju əŋ-la? oyɛŋ
Kynsai '3msg' build-pt obj house 'Kynsai built a house'
- (L2) brə ju phnyap-la? sa- bəseŋ
man '3msg' kill-pt obj snake '(the) man killed a snake'
- (L3) nə dənni di? 'I will go'
I go fut
- (L4) gju binnəŋ nəŋ
she eat con.asp 'she is eating'

Though the above order is the same as that of Khasi at the S-V-O level, there is some difference in the verbal complex. In Lyngngam the tense marker occurs after the verb (*la?/di?, nəŋ*), instead of preceding it as in Khasi.

- (K1) u kinsai u la ɕna ya ka yeŋ
prn. kynsai prn pt build obj house 'Kynsai built a house'
- (K2) u brieu u la pinyap ya u bseŋ
prn man prn pt kill obj snake '(the) man killed a snake'
- (K3) ŋan leit 'I will go'
I-fut go
- (K4) ka daŋ leit 'she is going'
she con-asp go

By comparing the above pairs, we can see some of the other differences between them.

4. Pronoun marking

The pronominal and agreement markers (*u/ka/ki*) which are found in Khasi (K1, 2) are not found in Lyngngam.

When a noun is used as subject in both Khasi and Lyngngam, then an appropriate third person pronoun is used immediately after the noun. If the noun is plural, then the third person plural pronoun is used. Examples K1, 2 and L1, 2 and L5, 6 illustrate this.

(L5) rəukmau du di laʔ leiʔleiʔ lala
 woman 3rdfem go pt quickly
 ‘the woman went quickly’

(L6) brə kyu di laʔ lingba laʔtap
 man 3rdpl go pt through forest
 ‘the people went through the forest’

Example L5 contains a feminine noun, as the pronoun is feminine. However, instead of full form *gdu*, the contracted form *-du*, (dropping the initial consonant) is used here. L6 contains a plural noun, as the pronoun is plural. (Here the initial consonant of the pronoun is not dropped; this may be due to the fact that the preceding noun ends in a vowel (this needs checking).

In Khasi this feature occurs with all nouns, even when a noun occurs as an object (see K1, K2) except when they occur as part of a compound. However, in Lyngngam it is restricted to human nouns only (note L7), and that only when they occur as subject of a sentence. So this feature is highly restricted in Lyngngam.

(L7) ksu wənnə: laʔ sə-myəu
 dog chase pt obj-cat ‘the dog chased the cat’

5. Verb constructions

Both Khasi and Lyngngam have the same three tense distinctions, present, past and future. However, their placement in the verbal complex differs.

‘present tense’	∅ in both
‘past tense’	la in Khasi, placed before the verb laʔ in Lyngngam, placed after the verb
‘future tense’	in in Khasi, placed before the verb diʔ in Lyngngam, placed after the verb
‘present cont.’	daŋ in Khasi, placed before the verb nən in Lyngngam, placed after the verb

Since in Lyngngam the future marker occurs after the verb, the phonetic merging of the pronominal marker (*u/ka/ki*) and the future marker (see K3) that is found in Khasi is not found here. The same holds good in the case of the negative marker as well.

In Khasi verbs are invariable, while in Lyngngam some verbs have two forms, a full form and a short form. The full form has an infix (or prefix) *Vn(n)* in it. The short form is used in the past tense only, while the full form is used elsewhere.

(L8) nə dənni ‘I go’,
 I go

- (L9) *nə* *di-la?* ‘I went’,
 I go-past
- (L10) *tu* *dənni-di?* ‘he will go’,
 he go-fut
- (L11) *tu* *di-la?* ‘he went’,
 he go-past
- (L12) *mi* *binnəŋ-di?* ‘you (sg.-masc.) will eat’
 you eat-fut
- (L13) *mi* *baŋ-la?* ‘you (sg.) ate’
 you eat -past

Consonant-initial verbs are infixed: *kap/kinnap* ‘bite’, *thaŋ/thinnaŋ* ‘burn’, *nap/ŋinnap* ‘die’, *baŋ/binnəŋ* ‘eat’. Vowel-initial verbs are prefixed: *ai/innai* ‘give’, *oŋ/innoŋ* ‘say’, etc. Though this type of variation is found mostly in verbs, some similar forms are found in other form classes as well, but their function is not clear (this needs further investigation).

Similarly, the change of order within a verbal complex is very interesting. However, in some data, the change is not maintained. (Is it due to the influence of Khasi, which most of the educated Lyngngams know?).

- (L14) *ju* *sa?* *dənni* ‘he shall go’, but:
 he mood go
- (L15) *ju* *wan-ŋəŋ* ‘he usually goes’
 he go hab.

In L14, the mood marker *sa?* occurs preceding the verb, as in Khasi; but in L15 *ŋəŋ* ‘habitual’ marker occurs after the verb, the usual Lyngngam construction. Similarly in L16.

- (L16) *ju* *bəŋ* *kinnoit* ‘he can eat’ (if he wishes to)
 he eat may

6. Word-formation

Here only one feature will be mentioned. Lyngngam uses infixation more commonly than the Khasi. Verbs are derived from nouns by infixing *-Vn(n)-* to the nouns in this variety, whereas it is the reverse in Khasi. However, this affixation type is not currently productive.

- (L17) L.: *snət* ‘a comb’ : *sinnət* ‘to comb’
 K.: *sa:d* ‘to comb’ : *sna:d* ‘a comb’
 L.: *ca:t* ‘a dance’ : *cinnət* ‘to dance’
 K.: *ça:d* ‘to dance’ : *çna:d* ‘a dance’;

L.:	cnɔŋ	'a village'	:	cinnoŋ	'to dwell'
K.:	çɔŋ	'to dwell, live'	:	çnoŋ	'village, dwelling'

In the last Lyngngam example, though the unaffixed noun form *çnoŋ* looks like the affixed Khasi form *çnoŋ*, it seems not to function like an affixed form.

Some other very limited nominalizations:

(L18)	L.:	pət/pinnət	'to sweep, clean'	:	cipnət	'a broom'
	K.:	sar	'to sweep, clean'	:	sinsar	'a broom';
	L.:	ənjuŋ	'to urinate'	:	punjɪŋ	'a urinary bladder'
	K.:	juŋ	'to urinate'	:	panjuŋ	'a urinary bladder'

The productive Lyngngam verbalizing system prefixes an infinitive marker *hat-*.

(L19)	khilyəp	'a fold'	:	hat-khilyəp	'to fold',
				hat-sŋge?	'to stop',
	incor	'clean'	:	hat-incor	'to clean', etc.

Whether all verbs have this kind of prefixation needs to be ascertained.

Compounding and contraction seem to be similar in both Khasi and Lyngngam, though contraction seems to be restricted in Lyngngam.

7. Negation

In all the tenses only the short form of the verb is used in negative constructions.

(L20)	jutu	ra	di?	ənji	
	he	pt.	go	neg.	'he is not going'
	gju	di?	ənji		
	she	go	neg.		'she did not go'
	khondəin	tu	bəŋji		
	boy	3ms	eat-neg.		'the boy does not eat'

Compare that with the negative formation in Khasi.

(K20)	um	daŋ	leit		
	he-neg.	cont.asp	go	'he is not going'	
	ka	khlem	leit		
	she	neg	go	'she did not go' (<i>khlem</i> is a neg. particle used only in past tense)	
	u	khinna?	um	ba:m	
	prn.	boy	he-neg.	eat	'the boy does not eat'

Though Khasi has *im*, *khlem*, *wat* as negative markers, the first one is used more commonly, except in past tense where the second form also can be used. Usually the first one occurs immediately after the subject, and becomes part of it formally. In contrast to this situation, in Lyngngam the negative marker is *ənji*, and occurs finally.

8. Interrogatives

The Lyngngam interrogative markers are quite different from those of Khasi. The Lyngngam prefix *a-* is used with nouns (in the illustrations here only pronouns). And a particle *mət/yət* or *minat* is placed at the end of the sentence as well: *yət* asks who, *mət* asks what or why, *minat* asks when (these need further study). So interrogation is marked in two places simultaneously in Lyngngam, but only in one place in Khasi.

(L21)	akudu	rəumət	di?	
	int-they	do-int.	pt	‘what did they do?’
	aꞑjutu	laꞑsmət		
	int-he	come-int.		‘why did he come?’
	atu	laꞑ	sa?	minat
	int-he	come	fut	int.
				‘when will he come?’
	aꞑju	laꞑ		minat
	int-she	come		int.
				‘when did she come?’
	ami/aphe	oꞑ	syət	
	int-you (m/f)	call	obj-int.	‘whom did you call?’ (s- obj. marker)
	aꞑni	əkot	əmbi	yət
	int-it	book	pos.	int.
				‘whose book is it?’
	ama	gu	bəꞑ	smət
	int-I		eat	int.
				‘why should I eat?’

Compare these with the Khasi forms:

(K21)	lano	un	wan	
	when?-fut	he-fut	come	‘when will he come?’
	minno	ka (la)	wan	
	when?-pt	she (pt)	come	‘when did she come?’
	yano	phi	la	khot
	obj-int.	you	pt	call
				‘whom did you call?’
	ka	dei	ka	kot
	prn	be	prn	book
				pos-int.
				‘whose book is it?’

10. Number

Surprisingly the Lyngngam data does not show clear number distinctions; it appears that there are no formal markers of plurality. But in Khasi *u/ka* and *ki* are singular and plural markers, respectively. It appears that quantifiers are used in Lyngngam with the nouns to make number distinctions. Lyngngam uses classifiers like the ones found in Khasi. In Khasi the number markers precede the nouns; while in Lyngngam the quantifiers also occur after the nouns. (In Khasi the adjectives also occur after the nouns).

(25)	L.	khon son	jimma many	'sons/many sons'	vs. K.	ki pl.	khun son
	L.	kon	indəŋ	'a son'			
	L.	son	alone				
(26)	L.	khon son	aŋŋut two	'two son(s)'	vs. K.	aŋŋut two	ki pl. khun son
(27)	L.	gulai horse	təʔwau one	'a horse'	vs. K.	u sg.	kulay horse
(28)	L.	gulai horse	taʔarə two	'two horse(s)'	vs. K.	aŋŋut two	ki pl. kulay horse
(29)	L.	gulai horse	əbon many	'horse(s)/many horse(s)'	vs. K.	ki pl.	kulay / horse
						khindyat many	ki pl. kulay horse
(30)	L.	san five	tilli clas.	'five thing(s)'	K.	san five	tilli clas.

11. Gender

No general gender marker is employed in Lyngngam, unlike in Khasi, where *u* is masculine, and *ka* is feminine. Only adjectives like *konthau/rəukmau* 'female/woman', *korəŋ* 'male' are employed for this purpose. The first one seems to be restricted to non-human nouns.

Observe the following forms:

(L31) *Feminine*

erəŋba (< er-rəŋba)	'fowl'
ba:bu rəukmau	'teacher'
khillot	'young person'
brə rəukmau	'person'
konthau (ba)	'spouse'
sə-konthau	'cow'

Masculine

erkonthau
ba:bu khonkorəŋ
khora:u
brə khonkorəŋ
korəŋ (ba)
sə-korəŋ
'bullock'

(L32)	<i>Generic</i>	<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>	
	‘cow’	masə	səkorəŋ	səkonthaɯ
	‘dog’	ksu	sukorəŋ	sukonthaɯ
	‘tiger’	khla	lakorəŋ	lakonthaɯ
	‘donkey’	ka:da	ka:dakorəŋ	ka:dakonthaɯ, etc.

The interesting sex-symbolism found in Khasi is not found in Lyngngam. For instance:

	<i>masculine</i>		<i>feminine</i>	
Khasi:	u bilor	‘bottle’ (glass)	: ka yit	‘glass’ (sheet)
	u prek	‘iron nail’	: ka raçi	‘sickle’
	u liŋka	‘crowbar’	: ka kurat	‘saw’
	u nar rot	‘iron rod’	: ka nar	‘iron sheet’, etc.

12. Case distinctions

Nominative case is unmarked in both Khasi and Lyngngam. In accusative case while the Lyngngam has two forms, *sa* and *o*, Khasi has *ya* only. *sa* is used with animate nouns while *o* is restricted to inanimate nouns.

- (33) (a) L. brə phnyap-la? sa bəsen ‘(the) man killed a snake’
 (K. u briew u la pinyap ya u bseŋ)
- (b) L. kinsai əŋ-la? o yen ‘Kynsai built a house’, etc.
 (K. u kinsai u la dep ya ka iyeŋ)

The instrumental case marker in Lyngngam is *ba?*, while in Khasi it is *bad*.

- (L34) ba? baɯ ‘with a stick’

The dative and locative case markers are the same in Lyngngam and Khasi.

The ablative case marker in Lyngngam is- *əm*, while in Khasi it is *na*.

- (35) L. əm cinəŋ ‘from the village’ (K. na ka çnoŋ)

The associative case marker is *nəm* in Lyngngam, while *bad* in Khasi.

- (36) L. siŋ judi-la? nəm g(ə)ju ‘Singh went with her’
 (K. u çin u la leit bad ka)

Even some adverbial prepositions show some differences.

- (37) ‘near’ L. jinga:n/jəŋa:n (K. hajan),
 ‘above’ L. tnom (K. halor),
 ‘outside’ L. təbar (K. habar), etc.

Conclusion:

The foregoing statements show clearly that the Lyngngam speech form is quite distinct from that of (Standard) Khasi. However, the question of whether this form should be considered as a dialect of Khasi or as a related language is a complicated one. Here, instead of arguing in either way, an attempt has been made to compare them and to highlight the similarities and differences between them. Further interpretation will be for the future.

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